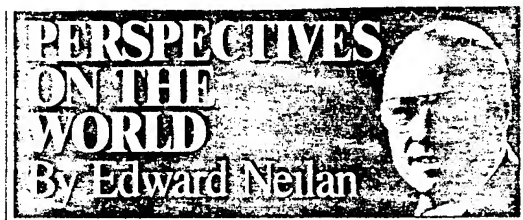


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WASHINGTON TIMES  
 16 January 1985



## Seeking one voice on foreign policy

A first-ever joint study involving most of America's major think tanks has come up with some recommendations on, among other things, foreign policy. Predictably, the suggestions are mostly pretty bland and will not grab readers by the throat.

But one proposal by the Committee on the Next Agenda in its report — which will be presented to the president and published today — is worthy of highlighting with one of those pink or yellow felt-tipped pens.

Here it is: "If the United States government is to be understood by adversary and ally alike, it must speak with a single presidential voice in foreign policy."

That statement alone is worth the price of admission.

A few weeks ago, reading the local English-language newspaper in the high-ceilinged, chandeliered dining room of a charming hotel in Buenos Aires, the traveling editor was struck by the number of voices speaking out from Washington datelines on what was supposed to be the official U.S. foreign policy line.

Here was President Reagan saying one thing. OK. Then there was Secretary of State George P. Shultz saying just about the same thing, but in slightly different language. Still OK.

But then, a news item reported, Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger is talking on the same subject with a decidedly different emphasis from that of the president and even more markedly different than that of Mr. Shultz. A final paragraph of the wire service article said "Mr. Shultz and Mr. Weinberger are known to be feuding over policy nuances as well as turf."

Pity the poor Argentine newspaper reader trying to make heads or tails out of where the United States stands after that. But, hold the phone. Turning the page, there is a "News Analysis" which tells the reader that Central Intelligence Agency chief William Casey is seeking White House backing for increased aid for guerrillas fighting in certain dense jungles against communists. The article lets it be known that Mr. Casey is being opposed in his quest by National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane.

"There is no way that increased aid will be given to anti-government guerrillas," yet another story quotes Rep. Stephen Solarz, D-N.Y., identified as "powerful chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee."

Is U.S. foreign policy in disarray or are a lot of officials talking about the same thing in different ways?

The first premise will be examined in a future essay. The second is the crux of the recommendation for more clarity in U.S. foreign policy enunciation made by the combined brainpower of the Hudson Institute, Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, Brookings Institution, Hoover Institution, and the Institute for Research on the Economics of Taxation.

"How other countries perceive the U.S. and its policies can be just as important as the reality," the report says astutely. "This murky issue of 'perception' has contributed to discussions with U.S. allies and enemies on issues such as burden sharing, economic policy, strategic policy and indeed, U.S. foreign relations generally."

In other words, if the United States is to retain and enhance its leadership position in the world, and provide the direction, peace and stability it seeks, this administration must improve its ability to get its ideas heard and understood.

The report insists that "the executive branch must be pre-eminent" in articulating foreign policy, as explicitly provided for in the Constitution, even though Congress plays a major role.

In the last several administrations, conflicts have arisen between at least two or more of the four key foreign policy departments of government: State, Defense, the CIA and the National Security Council.

"The result has been the appearance of incoherence," the report says.

Put another way, the perception to the outsider of U.S. foreign policy debate among various Washington agencies sometimes resembles the old Bud Abbott and Lou Costello "Who's on first?" routine.

The report recommends re-establishing the National Security Council as the foreign policy clearinghouse, bringing the widest range of information and analysis to the president and then coordinating decisions and monitoring implementation.

Central America is identified by the joint study as the area of greatest immediate foreign policy importance to the United States for a variety of reasons, not the least important being proximity.

What better place than in Central America for the United States to speak on its policies with clarity? The newspaper reader in Argentina, as well as the one in Amarillo, would like to know the score.

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